



## MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION FOR PUPIL TRANSPORTATION

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### Testimony on SB 575 and SB 576

#### Senate Committee on Transportation Michigan Senate

Tuesday, October 18, 2011

10:00 am

Room 100 Farnum Building, 125 W. Allegan Street  
Lansing, Michigan

Paul Wegmeyer  
Chair

#### MAPT Legislative Committee

Good afternoon. Thank you Chairman Casperson and the entire Senate Committee on Transportation for allowing us the opportunity to testify today before this distinguished committee regarding **SB 575** (2011). I would also like to extend our testimony to include **SB 576** (2011). On behalf of the Michigan Association for Pupil Transportation, we would like to acknowledge the sponsor of the bills, Senator Walker, for addressing the issue of school bus safety, a topic that is of high priority to our association's membership throughout Michigan.

My name is Paul Wegmeyer. I currently serve as the supervisor of transportation at Holt Public Schools. I am also a Third Party Test Examiner and owner of a Third Party Testing organization in Northern Lower Michigan which is authorized by the Michigan Department of State, Bureau of Regulatory Services, Driver Programs Division. I have been administering driver skills testing for driver candidates seeking a Michigan Commercial Driver's License (CDL) for the past sixteen (16) years.

The testimony I am providing for you today is on behalf of the Michigan Association for Pupil Transportation (MAPT) where I currently serve as chairperson of the association's Legislative Committee.

MAPT represents over 800 pupil transportation officials from 826 public, private and contract school bus fleets throughout Michigan. These administrators oversee the effective, efficient and safe transportation of approximately 860,000<sup>1</sup> children to and from school, every school day, on approximately 15,000 school buses driven by some 15,000 Michigan school bus drivers who cover over 1,000,000 miles [*the equivalent of 40 trips around the world*] every school day throughout Upper and Lower Michigan in accomplishing this task.

SB 575 (2011) and SB 576 (2011) would require the opening of Public Act 187 of 1990 to amend Sections 5, 31 and 55 to enable public transit buses to be retrofitted with all lighting equipment necessary to operate school bus routes and perform school bus stops with a non-yellow and black public transit bus.

The members of our association oppose this legislative effort for a number of reasons. First, and foremost, public transit buses fail to meet exclusive design and construction standards that are set by the Federal Transit Administration to meet the safety needs of transporting a wide range of children by age and body size. 49 CFR 571 of the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards defines what can and cannot be used as a school bus. Public transportation buses do not meet safety standards defined at the federal level for transporting school children.

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<sup>1</sup> 2007-08 SE-4094 Pupil Transportation Expense Report, Michigan Department of Education, Fall 2008

These standards prescribe a series of manufacturing specifications that are exclusive to research-based design and construction standards. Such standards including federal requirements for seat compartmentalization as well as side impact and roll over crash protection that is not found in pupil transit vehicles or commercial motorcoach vehicles. In short, by federal definition, a public transit bus cannot be used as a school bus.

School bus drivers in Michigan are among the most highly licensed and trained drivers of commercial motor vehicles on the road. By law, school bus drivers must possess a base Chauffeur license, a Commercial Driver License (CDL), a "P" passenger endorsement and a unique "S" school bus endorsement for transporting school children. All school bus drivers in Michigan are fingerprinted, participate in required random drug and alcohol testing consortiums and obtain a minimum of six hours of highly specialized continuing education training every two years as administered by the Michigan Department of Education. Public transit drivers fall short in many of these areas.

There are many decisions that are made when determining where school bus stops are placed, when school children may or may not cross the road, when and where yellow and red overhead lights need to be activated, etc. The display board in front of you demonstrates this complex decision-making process. Trained school bus drivers perform their jobs in a way that makes routine school bus stops seem simple. However, there is much involved in making the procedures work seamlessly and flawlessly each day throughout the state and school bus drivers in Michigan have demonstrated years of success in getting our kids to and from school safer than any other group of commercial drivers. This safety record is not something to take for granted.

What might be a public response to equipping public transit buses to perform the task of school buses?

For many years, the motoring public in our state has been trained to recognize the yellow and black school bus and to give extra caution to watch for children who cross the road when they see a yellow and black school bus with the overhead red lights on. This same public has had no expectation to reduce speed or, much less, come to a complete stop when a public transit bus performs its version of a community bus stop. Having children cross the road to board a public transit bus would cause utter chaos across the state and put the children of our great state at great risk.

Lastly, unlike public transit buses which serve and open their doors to the general public, yellow and black school buses provide pupil transportation that is exclusive to school-aged children only. This is especially important to parents of young children throughout the state who have the expectation that when their child is in the safe environment of the yellow and black school bus, they can be assured of their child's safety and protection from persons that might harm them when unattended by the parent or guardian. I assure you that many, if not most, parents across the state would be outraged if they were to discover that their Kindergarten children and our youngest of learners were riding to and from school on a bus that could openly contain sex offenders and unwelcomed adults of any age. That will not fly with most families in Michigan.

No other vehicle on the road holds such a nationally recognized level of community acceptance than a yellow and black school bus. The confidence level in the yellow and black school bus driver is unmatched and unquestioned when parents send their children to the bus stop for a ride to school. For no other vehicle do

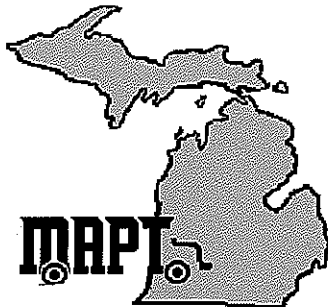
parents send their children out to the street to board with a driver who they do not personally know, than with a traditional school bus.

While there may be responsible ways to find more efficient use for vehicles used in public transit and in school bus transportation, any attempt to use public transit buses as school buses in Michigan is a wrong move and a costly move which we, as a state, cannot not afford.

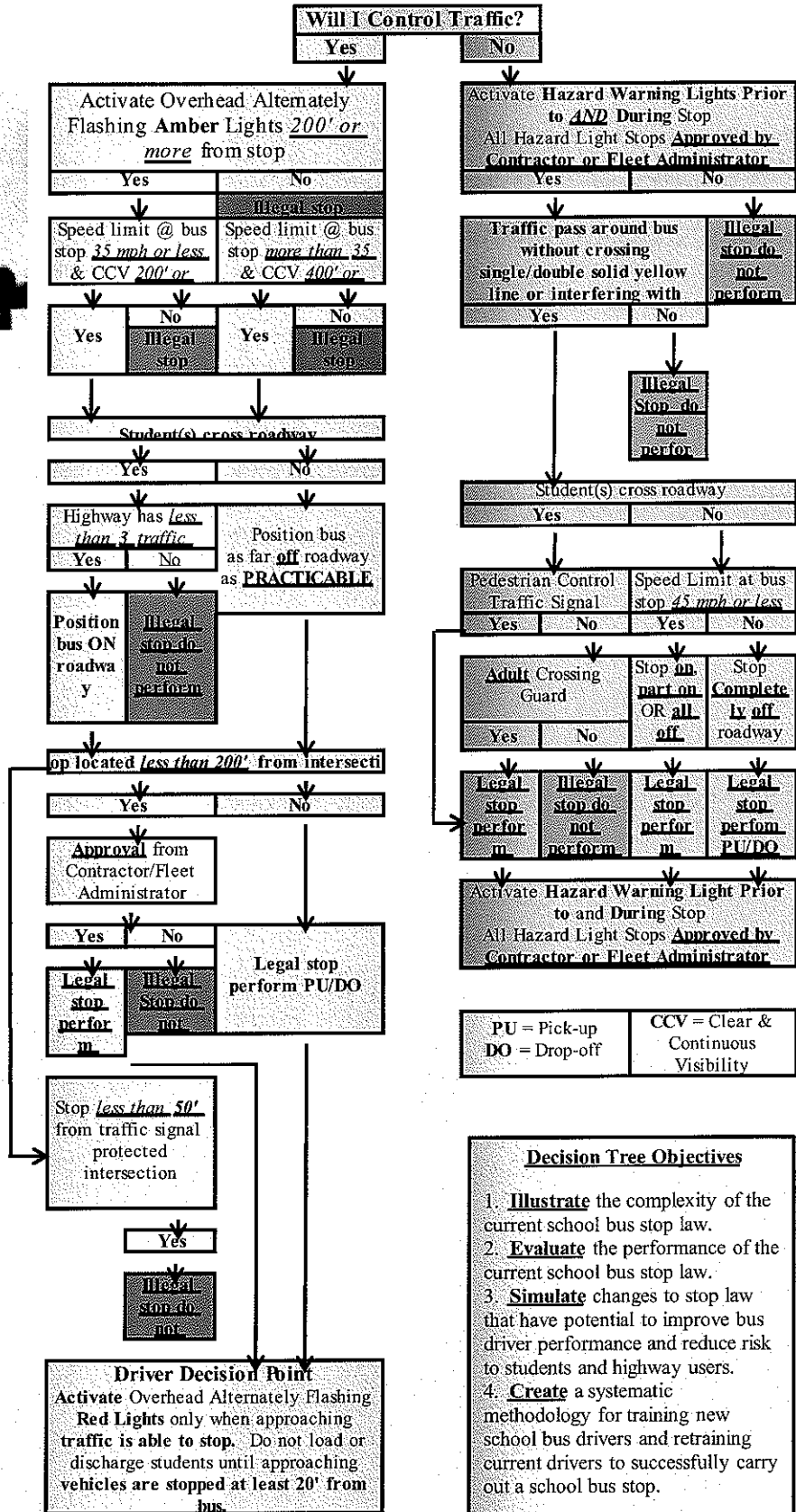
On behalf of the Michigan Association for Pupil Transportation, we **strongly OPPOSE** SB 575 and SB 576 and request that the Committee not report out the bills at this time.

Mr. Chairman, I would be happy to address any questions you or your fellow committee members may have.

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# School Bus Stop Decision Tree



## Decision Tree Objectives

1. **Illustrate** the complexity of the current school bus stop law.
2. **Evaluate** the performance of the current school bus stop law.
3. **Simulate** changes to stop law that have potential to improve bus driver performance and reduce risk to students and highway users.
4. **Create** a systematic methodology for training new school bus drivers and retraining current drivers to successfully carry out a school bus stop.